

PERSONAL NOTES

PREACHING THAT GETS THROUGH TO PEOPLE

Introduction

- 1 These notes are based on the account of Paul's preaching in Athens (Acts 17:16—34).
- 2 It is an excellent example of how Paul, a Jew, proclaimed the Christian message in a Gentile context. There are parallels with today's society and culture, where we cannot assume any proper belief in God, any recognition of scriptural authority, or any accepted standard of moral absolutes.

1 PAUL'S AUDIENCE

Three different categories of hearer confronted Paul in Athens.

- **Hedonists**

1 Mention is made of the Epicureans (v 18), who were pleasure- orientated in their approach to life. 'Out for a good time'.

2 They held that everything in life happened by chance, and therefore adopted the attitude: 'Make the most of things while you can, because you never know what is round the corner'.

3 They regarded pleasure and self-gratification as the main purpose in life, and it extended right through the whole range of life experience:

- The physical
- The intellectual
- The spiritual
- The sexual

- **Escapists**

1 Mention is made of them when it talks about the Stoics (v 18). These were the people in ancient times who sought refuge and escape from life's troubles.

2 Their religious philosophy was that everything is God. It was a form of Pantheism, and has re-emerged in our day as New Age philosophy.

3 They saw life's goal as absorption into the Divine and the spiritual. They tended to regard life, death, pleasure, pain, public opinion and suicide with indifference.

- **Novelty Seekers**

1 Notice Luke's verdict on the Athenians (v 21).

2 Many of them reckoned that as civilization progressed, the latest idea must be the truest and the best.

3 How do we react to people's concern for 'things' instead of God? (see v 16)

4 Do we seek to approach people in the way most likely to reach them? Notice how Paul took advantage of the situation.

- The Athenians' habit of discussion (v 17)
- The Athenians' desire for knowledge (v 20)

5 The Areopagus was really two things: (1) a place, Mar's Hill, and (ii) a select court, responsible for public morals.

2 **PAUL'S APPROACH**

- **Size up the Situation**

Paul takes time and trouble to walk round the city with his eyes wide open (vv 22,23). By so doing he sees into people's hearts and minds, as well as appreciating their worldview.

- **Find Points of Contact**

Three things provide an ideal opening for his remarks: (1) an altar, (ii) an inscription and (iii) a poem. These things were all more familiar to Paul's hearers than to him.

- **Prepare People's Minds**

With Jews Paul always went directly to the OT scriptures, but with Greeks/Gentiles he began with creation (vv 24-30). Before these Athenian philosophers can face the truth about Christ they need to: - believe in God as their Creator (v 25)

- see Him as their Sustainer (v 28)
- recognise they are responsible to God (vv 29,30)

- **Confront People with Christ**

What are the five essential facts about who Christ is that need to be explained, accepted and experienced (v 31)?

- **Develop Things Further**

- 1 Do we give sufficient thought and time to pre-evangelism? People need to be prepared (like soil) for the gospel (like seed).
- 2 Real wisdom is needed in speaking to people who seem hazy about God. Remember: 'Not far from each one' (v 27).
- 3 Paul did more while he waited than some people do when they are working (v 16).
- 4 It was not the sights in Athens, but the souls that attracted him, he was a missionary, not a tourist. He has often been described as 'Paul among the philosophers; the greatest man who ever spoke on Mars' Hill'